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ABSTRACT

This study examined and assessed teachers' and students' use of and reactions to the Heartwood Program, a multicultural, literature-based curriculum designed to promote elementary students' ethical understanding of courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love. The Pennsylvania Department of Education Division of Federal Programs (Chapter 1) supported a field test and evaluation of the Heartwood Program in 16 school districts across the state. In 15 of the districts, typically a Chapter 1 pull-out teacher was selected to participate in the field test; in the remaining district, the program was offered to all teachers in an elementary school. Information on teacher training, program materials, classroom use of the program, and program outcomes was collected. Results indicated that: (1) almost all teachers emphasized the importance and need for this type of program in their schools; (2) the program was teacher-friendly; (3) program materials should be reviewed to strengthen the sequencing of stories and activities, the coverage and portrayal of some minority cultures, and the level of difficulty of story lines for primary grade students; and (4) the appropriate placement of the program in a school's instructional program needs additional thought. (A list of interview questions is attached.) (RS)

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Evaluation of Heartwood Program

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Evaluation of Heartwood Program
Executive Summary

Joan L. Buttram, Janice Kruse, and Jennifer Sidler
Research for Better Schools

The Heartwood Program is a multicultural, literature-based curriculum designed to promote elementary students' ethical understanding of seven attributes: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love. In the program, an adult reads a story to a group of students, discusses its contents and their students' reactions to it, and helps them complete related classroom activities.

During the 1991-91 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Division of Federal Programs (Chapter 1) supported a field test and evaluation of the Heartwood Program in 16 school districts across the state. In 15 of the districts, typically a Chapter 1 pull-out teacher was selected to participate in the field test; in the remaining district, the program was offered to all teachers in an elementary school.

The purpose of this evaluation was to examine and assess teachers' and students' use of and reactions to the Heartwood Program. RBS visited field test teachers to collect information on teacher training, program materials, classroom use of the program, and program outcomes. The major findings of the evaluation are summarized below.

- Almost all teachers emphasized the importance and need for this type of program in their schools. Teachers felt strongly that students were lacking in their ethical development, and that this program provided a constructive strategy for initiating discussions with students in this critical area.

- The Heartwood Program is teacher-friendly. With very little training, teachers can learn the basic elements of the program. However, more time should be devoted to demonstrations of how to use the program materials to promote students' in-depth discussion and understanding of the seven attributes.

- The program materials should be reviewed to strengthen: the sequencing of stories and activites from year to year; the coverage and portrayal of some minority cultures, especially Hispanics and African-American; and the level of difficulty of story lines for primary grade students.

- The appropriate placement of the Heartwood Program in a school's instructional program needs additional thought. In the current field test, both Chapter 1 pull-out classrooms and self-contained classrooms were included. The results generally indicated that teachers felt the program worked best when they were able to use the program on a regular, more prolonged, and interdisciplinary basis. Pull-out programs where teacher-student interactions were extremely limited and outcomes explicitly defined (i.e., improvement of reading scores) were probably not the ideal situation.

Evaluation of Heartwood Program
Final Report

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Research for Better Schools

The Heartwood Program is a multicultural, literature-based curriculum that uses classic children's stories from around the world to present universal values to students in kindergarten through grade six. The program promotes ethical understanding by exposing the students to seven core attributes: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love. In the program, an adult reads a story to a group of students, discusses its contents and their students' reactions to it, and helps them complete related classroom activities. Each Heartwood Program kit consists of a teacher's guide, the 21 books (three per attribute), an activity card for each book that suggests discussion questions and follow-up activities, a world map, and flags of the countries represented by the stories.

During the 1991-91 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Division of Federal Programs (Chapter 1) supported the field test of the Heartwood Program in 16 school districts across the state. These districts represented urban, rural, and suburban areas with primarily white, minority, or mixed student populations. In 15 of the districts, a single teacher was selected by the district Chapter 1 coordinator to participate in the field test; in most cases, this individual was a Chapter 1 teacher who worked with students as part of a pull-out reading program. In the remaining district (School District of Philadelphia), the program was offered to all teachers in an elementary school; most of the teachers were assigned to self-contained classrooms. The teachers from the first 15 districts attended a half-day training program in Lancaster, PA in mid-November; the Philadelphia teachers received their training in a half-day session at their school in mid-January. Following the training, teachers were encouraged to use the Heartwood Program in their classrooms as they desired.

Evaluation Design and Procedures

Research for Better Schools (RBS) was contracted to evaluate the Heartwood Program by PDE. The purpose of the evaluation during the 1991-92 school year was to examine and assess teachers' and students' use and reactions to the Heartwood Program. Given the fairly short period of time allowed for the field test this school year, no formal assessment was conducted of the program's impacts on students (e.g., ethical understanding). RBS instead decided to focus the evaluation on collecting descriptive information on the program's use. This information was seen as useful to the Heartwood developers as they revise and modify the program's materials and to PDE as it considers future support of the program.

In order to carry out this evaluation, RBS first met with several of the Heartwood Program developers and the head of the PDE Division of Federal Programs. At these meetings, the program's purpose, components and use, training and support provided to teachers, and evaluation objectives were discussed. RBS also obtained and reviewed a Heartwood Program kit. RBS constructed a loosely-structured teacher interview (see Appendix A) to guide

the collection of information on teacher training, program materials, classroom use of the program, and program outcomes at each of the Heartwood field test districts. This instrument was shared with the Heartwood Program developers for their review and comment. RBS also expected to observe individual teachers conducting Heartwood lessons in order to describe the program's use with students and their reactions to it. No formal observation scale was developed to gather this information. Instead, RBS planned to record the teacher's and students' actions and affect.

RBS contacted by telephone and arranged visits with the 15 non-Philadelphia field test teachers with two exceptions. RBS was unable to arrange a visit with one teacher because of scheduling conflicts and the other teacher was unwilling to participate in the evaluation. During the 13 completed visits, the teacher was interviewed about the Heartwood program and a Heartwood lesson was observed, using the instrument and procedures described above. These visits typically lasted about 90-120 minutes. RBS was unable to conduct an observation with two of the teachers because they had either discontinued or never used the program.

In the elementary school in the School District of Philadelphia, teachers were asked to sign up for an interview and/or observation by RBS in late May. Eight teachers volunteered to be interviewed and one to be observed. Six of the eight interviewed teachers reported reading some of the storybooks as part of their literature or social studies programs during the spring, but seldom used any of the other program materials; the other two reported that they were not using the program. All of the Philadelphia teachers indicated that their classroom routines were well-established by the mid-January training date and so it was difficult to incorporate significant portions of the Heartwood program into their instructional program so late in the school year.

RBS staff members recorded interview comments and observation notes after completing each visit. The interview and observation data were aggregated and analyzed once all of the data collection was completed. Because the Heartwood Program received such limited use in the Philadelphia classrooms, the interview and observation data were of limited use in these analyses. Nevertheless, their feedback was incorporated where appropriate and relevant.

Evaluation Findings

RBS' findings are summarized below. They are organized according to the four interview categories listed above -- teacher training, program materials, classroom use of materials, and program outcomes.

Teacher training. The majority of teachers remembered the Heartwood training with enthusiasm. The trainer was described by many as "committed," "compassionate," "enthusiastic," and "genuine." They vaguely recalled being told about the origins and theory behind the Heartwood Program and its different components; few were able to remember many concrete details of the training that had occurred several months past. In spite of the comparatively short time allotted for training, few felt that additional assistance was needed. Those who did wish for more training suggested that additional guidance was needed on fostering ethical discussions, that is, how to plan

activities that would emphasize and reinforce ethical understanding on the part of students. Others asked for sample lessons. About half of the teachers indicated that a follow-up session where they could share experiences and exchange ideas would be helpful; the other half did not suggest any follow-up assistance.

Program materials. All of the field test teachers were able to list and point to all of the Heartwood materials in their classrooms. The Heartwood Program materials were highly commended by the field test teachers. One Chapter 1 teacher declared that the developers deserved a "gold star" for organizing the materials and making the program so easy for teachers to use; this sentiment was echoed by many others who spoke glowingly of the flexibility, adaptability, and organization of the Heartwood materials.

The children's stories were the most praised part of the Heartwood Program. All of the teachers complimented the selection of the books for their attention to story and illustration. Although most of the teachers felt that the inclusion of ethical and/or multicultural themes was well done, some teachers expressed concern. This was especially the case in the Philadelphia school. For example, a few teachers noted that the Heartwood-identified attribute for a particular story was not always the most prominent attribute. Teachers with a large percentage of Spanish-speaking students bemoaned the absence of stories about Hispanic cultures. Teachers of classes with African-American students were split on their assessments of the books. Some praised the inclusion of books with African-American characters or themes; others felt that African-Americans were not portrayed positively or were not the central character in the story (e.g., Peewee Reese was featured over Jackie Robinson in Teammates, Peg Leg overshadowed the slaves escaping the South in Follow the Drinking Gourd). In addition, many of the teachers felt that some of the stories were too difficult for younger students (below third grade) or those with extremely limited backgrounds and suggested adding books to the collection that would be easier for these students to understand.

The activity cards containing discussion questions and follow-up activities were seen as "terrific starting points" by most of the staff. One beginning teacher felt that these cards "helped her to use the program." Other more experienced teachers reported mixed use of the activity cards; some glanced at them quickly but often developed their own activities. Teachers with primary grade students reported that the suggested activities often were inappropriate for their young students.

Classroom use of program. The use of the Heartwood Program differed significantly in Philadelphia versus non-Philadelphia classrooms. In Philadelphia, the program's use was significantly constricted. Six of the eight classroom teachers reported in their interviews that they read Heartwood stories to their students either weekly or biweekly, while one reported monthly readings, and another one indicated that she was not using the program. Only two of the teachers used the discussion questions and follow-up activities to any extent; the other teachers felt that the questions and activities were too time consuming or did not easily fit into their already established classroom routines. As a result of their limited use of the program, it was not feasible to gather meaningful classroom use data and so most of the data reported in this section are based on the experiences of the non-Philadelphia teachers.

Twelve of the 13 non-Philadelphia teachers had used the Heartwood program in the months intervening between training and RBS' visit. Seven of these teachers were using the Heartwood Program in their pull-out Chapter 1 reading classes in grades 1-5, two were using it in a Chapter 1-regular education teaming effort in reading in grades 4 and 9, one was using it in a self-contained reading class in combined grades 6 and 7, one was using it in a self-contained, Chapter 1 second grade classroom, and one was using it in a self-contained first grade classroom. One Chapter 1 teacher decided not to use the program because she felt the materials were "too babyish" for her fifth grade students. Frequency of use in these classrooms varied considerably, from twice weekly to once a month, with most using it every second or third week. Many of the Chapter 1 teachers in pull-out assignments reported that they were not comfortable using the Heartwood Program more often because of their limited contact time with students (i.e., typically between 30 and 45 minutes each week) and the pressure they felt to concentrate on improving reading skills. In addition, they felt that the activities required too much time for them to use along with the stories in their limited periods.

Teachers reported that it took very little time to develop a Heartwood lesson; about 20 minutes seemed to be the average. When delivered, the lessons typically involved a short orientation to the story, usually about 5-10 minutes depending on the difficulty of the book and the age of the students; reading the story, usually 15-20 minutes; follow-up discussion, from 5 to 15 minutes depending on the period of time available; and some follow-up activities. Teachers showed the most diversity in their inclusion of follow-up activities, many of which emphasized writing or art. Teachers' inclusion of follow-up activities was somewhat dependent on the classroom's grade level and pull-out or team/self-contained status. Several teachers planned extensive follow-up activities that often required 3-4 hours of preparation on their part and several class periods for students to complete.

RBS saw a wide variety of activities during its observations, including teachers reading stories to students; teachers and students discussing story lines, characters, and the attributes; and students completing follow-up activities. Not surprising, teachers seemed very proficient at reading the stories and leading student discussions to check comprehension. In nine of the 12 observations (75.0 percent), teachers or students were engaged in discussions or other activities that touched on the underlying attribute. However, in many of these observations, the discussions or activities were superficial and not directed at deepening students' understanding of the attribute. In the other three observations, teachers attended primarily to fairly narrow discussions of the story line or characters.

Heartwood outcomes. Most of the teachers reported that insufficient time had elapsed to determine the program's impacts on students. Teachers generally felt that students were learning about the attributes, but were unable to document any specific effects. Several teacher related anecdotes about students' labeling other stories or characters as illustrating a particular attribute. One teacher reported that students in her pull-out class seemed to be more tolerant and understanding of each other. All of the teachers stressed the importance of programs like Heartwood and the critical need for teachers to promote students' ethical understanding and behavior, but also underscored the difficulty of measuring student growth in this area.

Evaluation Findings

Based on RBS' limited evaluation, the following conclusions were made about the Heartwood Program.

- Almost all teachers emphasized the importance and need for this type of program in their schools. Teachers felt strongly that students were lacking in their ethical development, and that this program provided a constructive strategy for initiating discussions with students in this critical area.

- The Heartwood Program is teacher-friendly. With very little training, teachers can learn the basic elements of the program. However, the training should be carefully examined to ensure that sufficient time is allotted for demonstrating how to use the stories, discussion questions, and follow-up activities to foster students' in-depth understanding of the seven attributes.

- A careful review of the different stories should be carried out to make sure that all of the major racial and ethnic groups encountered by teachers are represented and presented positively. In addition, this review should examine the difficulty level of the stories to ensure that the story collection and activities are appropriate for primary grade students.

- Some thought should be given to the sequencing of the Heartwood Program from year to year. If the program is to be used over the course of the entire elementary grades, then the number of stories and accompanying materials should be increased to accomodate repeated years of exposure.

- Additional consideration should be given to the appropriate placement of the Heartwood Program in a school's instructional program; it may not be realistic to expect the program to function effectively in pull-out situations where instructional time is so tightly constrained.

Appendix A

Heartwood Interview Questions

Teacher Training

- What training do teachers receive to facilitate their use of the Heartwood curriculum?
- What follow-up assistance is available to help teachers use the Heartwood curriculum?
- What assistance is provided to teachers as part of the written Heartwood curriculum?
- What other types of training activities or assistance would help teachers use the Heartwood curriculum?

Curriculum Materials

- What materials are included in the Heartwood curriculum for teachers to use with students?
- Does the Heartwood curriculum appeal to the various cultures present in teachers' classrooms? Do any groups feel over- or under-represented? Explain.
- Is there sufficient variety in the reading level, story lines, and cultures for the Heartwood stories to appeal to a broad cross-section of children? Explain.
- Is there sufficient variety in the discussion questions, activities, and interdisciplinary ideas that accompany each story to appeal to a broad cross-section of children? Explain.
- Are there sufficient instructions to help teachers read the stories and use the activity cards with students? Explain. What other items should be included?
- What other assistance would be helpful to teachers in facilitating their use of the Heartwood curriculum with students?

Classroom Use of Materials

- How are teachers using the Heartwood curriculum in their classrooms? Do they follow the recommended lesson plans? What, if any, changes have they made in the recommended use? Explain.
- How much time do teachers spend preparing to use the Heartwood curriculum in their classrooms?
- How often do teachers use the Heartwood curriculum in their classrooms? As part of what disciplines or subject areas?

- How do teachers react to the Heartwood curriculum? Are they comfortable using it? Do they feel comfortable talking to students about these issues?

- How do students react to the Heartwood curriculum? Are they eager to hear the stories and complete the activities?

Heartwood Outcomes

- What have students learned about the seven attributes?

- Have students' reading scores changed during their participation in the Heartwood program?

- Has the school and/or classroom climate changed during students' participation in the program?